

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAKAR 2892

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, SG

SUBJECT: FESTERING STUDENT STRIKE AT UNIVERSITY OF DAKAR SPREADS

REF A DAKAR 1836, B DAKAR 1915, C DAKAR 1285, D DAKAR 1429

1. SUMMARY: STRIKE CONTINUES BY FACULTY OF SCIENCE STUDENTS PROTESTING 15-YEAR GOVERNMENT SERVICE OBLIGATION FOR SCHOLARSHIP HOLDERS. DURING APRIL 20-22 SUMMITS IN DAKAR, STRIKE SPREAD TO OTHER PARTS OF UNIVERSITY, LYCEES AND SOME PRIMARY SCHOOLS, WITH ISOLATED STREET DEMONSTRATIONS AND SOM PROPERTY DAMAGE REPORTED APRIL 26. SENEGALESE GOVERNMENT HAS AVOIDED INFLAMING SITUATION AND HAS RESPONDED TO SOME STUDENT GRIVEANCES WHILE HOLDING FIRM ON PRINCIPLE OF 15-YEAR SERVICE COMMITMENT. GROWING NUMBERS OF STUDENTS INVOLVED AND WIDER QUESTIONS BEING RAISED ABOUT PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION IN SENEGAL ARE RAPIDLY INCREASING PRESSURES ON GOVERNMENT FOR DECISIVE ACTION TO RESOLVE SITUATION. END SUMMARY.

2. STUDENT STRIKE AT UNIVERSITY OF DAKAR'S FACULTY OF SCIENCE (REFTELS A AND B) WAS NOT RESOLVED DURING EASTER VACATION, AND BOYCOTT OF CLASSES BY MOST OF FACULTY'S 800 STUDENTS CONTINUED WHEN CLASSES RESUMED TWO WEEKS AGO. MAJOR GRIEVANCE REMAINS SENEGALESE GOVERNMENT (GOS) POLICY
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THAT SUTDENTS VENEFITTING FROM FULL SCHOLARSHIPS SIGN AGREEMENT TO SERVE FOR FIFTEEN YEARS IN GOVERNMENT SERVICE AFTER GRADUATION.

3. DISPUTE WIDENED BEYOND SCIENCE FACULTY FOR FIRST TIME DURING APRIL 20-22 FRANCO-AFRICAN/OCAM SUMMITS IN DAKAR, WHEN STUDENTS IN OTHER PARTS OF UNIVERSITY AND

LOCAL LYCEES PROCLAIMED 72-HOUR SYMPATHY STRIKE TO DISPLAY "SOLIDARITY WITH OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS." THIS WAS INTERPRETED BY MANY AS CALCULATED ATTEMPT TO EMBARRASS GOVERNMENT IN FOREIGN EYES, BUT PRESENCE OF MANY STUDENTS IN STREETS TO VIEW VISITING CHIEFS OF STATE MADE IT DIFFICULT TO BE SURE HOW MANY WERE STRIKING AND HOW MANY WERE SIMPLY ENJOYING FESTIVE ATMOSPHERE WHICH PREVAILED DURING SUMMITS. STRIKE CONTINUES TO SPREAD THIS WEEK. ONLY HANDFUL OF STUDENTS WERE REPORTED PRESENT AT UNIVERSITY'S SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM APRIL 25, FOR EXAMPLE. PRIMARY AND JUNIOR HIGH-LEVEL STUDENTS IN DOWNTOWN DAKAR AND SUBURB OF PIKINE WERE CIRCULATING IN STREETS APRIL 26, IMPEDING TRAFFIC AND RAPPING ON PASSING CARS. WINDOWS HAVE BEEN SHATTERED AT ONE LOWER SCHOOL AND AT LEAST ONE CAR HAS BEEN OVERTURNED NEAR LYCEE BLAISE DIAGNE.

4. FACULTY OF SCIENCE STUDENTS ARE DEMANDING THAT 15-YEAR COMMITMENT BE REDUCED TO 10 YEARS AND INTERPRETED AS APPLYING TO ANY WORK INSIDE SENEGAL RATHER THAN JUST GOVERNMENT SERVICE. STUDENTS ALSO SEEK REPRESENTATION ON UNIVERSITY COUNCIL AND VARIOUS REFORMS OF EXAMINATION, GRADING AND SCHOLARSHIP SYSTEMS.

5. AFTER SUCCESSFUL RESOLUTION OF FEBRUARY LYCEE DISTURBANCES (REFTELS B-D), GOS HAS MADE CONCENTRATED EFFORT NOT TO INFLAME FACULTY OF SCIENCE SITUATION, WHILE REFUSING TO YIELD ON 15-YEAR POLICY. IT DECLINED FOR TWO MONTHS TO SEND POTENTIALLY PROVOCATIVE POLICE PRESENT ONTO CAMPUS. SEVERAL OFFICIAL ULTIMATA HAVE BEEN ISSUED
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TO STRIKING STUDENTS TO RETURN TO CLASSES WHICH GOS HAS CHOSEN NOT TO ENFORCE WHEN STUDENTS FAILED TO COMPLY. IN INTERVIEW PUBLISHED APRIL 15, MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION OUSMANE CAMARA INDICATED THAT STUDENTS WOULD BE OBLIGED TO RETURN TO CLASSES BY APRIL 18 IF THEY HOPED TO RECEIVE CREDIT FOR ACADEMIC YEAR. HE SAID THAT, IF THEY DID RETURN BY THAT DATE, SCHOLARSHIPS OF STRIKERS CANCELLED MARCH 31 WOULD BE RESTORED. HOWEVER, STUDENTS DID NOT RETURN.

6 ON APRIL 24, AFTER DEPARTURE OF VISITING CHIEFS OF STATE, JOURNALISTS QUESTIONED MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION CAMARA AND UNIVERSITY RECTOR SEYDOU MADANI SY IN LIVELY TELEVIEWED "ROUND TABLE." (SAMPLE QUESTION: MISTER MINISTER, HOW DO YOU ANSWER STUDENT CHARGES THAT YOU ARE NOT OPEN TO DIALOGUE?). SY AND CAMARA REPLIED THAT GOVERNMENT WAS BEING RESPONSIVE TO SOME STUDENT GRIEVANCES. THEY SAID GOS WAS PREPARED TO EXTEND ACADEMIC YEAR FOR SCIENCE STUDENTS TILL JULY TO ALLOW THEM TO MAKE UP LOST EIGHT WEEKS OF CLASSES, AND GOS ALSO MADE OTHER CONCESSIONS.

HOWEVER, MINISTER STILL MAINTAINED THAT 15-YEAR OBLIGATION WOULD HAVE TO BE SIGNED IN FALL BY STUDENTS ON FULL SCHOLARSHIP, REEMPHASIZED THAT STUDENTS, UNLIKE WORKERS, DIS NOT HAVE RIGHT TO STRIKE, AND SAID HE REMAINED UNWILLING TO MEET WITH STUDENTS AS LONG AS THEY WERE ON STRIKE. MINISTER APPEALED TO PARENTS TO INDUCE THEIR OFFSPRING TO RETURN TO CLASS.

7. COMMENT: FOR SOCIETY WITH "SOCIALIST" ASPIRATIONS, CURRENT SITUATION OFFERS REVEALING SPECTACLE. POINTING TOWARD WHAT THEY REGARD AS CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION BY HIGH PLACED SENEGALESE IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS, STUDENTS INSIT THAT THEY SHOULD NOT BE VICTIMIZED BY BEING FORECED INTO RELATIVELY LOW PAYING JOBS AS TEACHERS OR CIVIL SERVANTS; INSTEAD, THEY ARGUE, THOSE SALARIES SHOULD BE RAISED TO COMPETE WITH PRIVATE SECTOR. ON OTHER HAND, AS INDICATED BY PRESIDENT SENGHOR'S CRITICISM OF STRIKING

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STUDENTS (DAKAR 2398, A-37), SENIOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HAVE LITTLE PATIENCE WITH MERITS OF STUDENT POSITION, ARGUING THAT STUDENTS ARE PRIVILEGED LOT IN FIRST PLACE, AND POINTING OUT THAT NO ONE IS COMPELLED TO ACCEPT FULL SCHOLARSHIPS; "PETIT BOURGEOIS" STUDENTS SEEKING THEIR FORTUNES IN PRIVATE SECTOR SHOULD PAY THEIR OWN WAY THROUGH UNIVERISTY, ACCORDING TO THIS APPROACH. IN VIEW OF THIS CONTINUING WIDE GULF AND PROTARACTED LENGTH OF PROTEST, IT WAS WIDELY SPECULATED LAST WEEK THAT GOVERNMENT WOULD CRACK DOWN ON SUTDENT STRIKERS AFTER DEPARTURE OF SUMMIT VISITORS. HIGHER EDUCATION MINISTER CAMARA REPORTEDLY HAS LONG FAVORED STERN RESPONSE. IN ANY CASE, BOTH GROWING NUMBERS OF STUDENTS INVOLVED AND BROADENING SCOPE OF QUESTIONS BEING RAISED ABOUT PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION IN SENEGAL ARE RAPIDLY INCREASING PRESSURE ON GOVERNMENT TO COME TO GRIPS WITH LONG FESTERING STRIKE ONCE AND FOR ALL. BRIGHTEST SPOT FROM GOVERNMENT'S POINT OF VIEW MAY BE FACT THAT NO SIGNS HAVE YET EMERGED OF SUCCESSFUL ATTEMPTS TO MAKE COMMON CAUSE BETWEEN STUDENTS AND WORKERS, WHICH PROVED POTENT COMBINATION DURING 1968 DISTURBANCES IN SENEGAL. ANY MOVES IN THAT DIRECTION WOULD BE UNDOBTED SOURCE OF CONCERN TO AUTHORITIES WITH ANNUAL MAY 1 PARADE BY MASSED TRADE UNIONISTS LESS THAN WEEK AWAY.

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